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## **Grandparents' visitation rights restored**

**LANSING** -- All over Michigan, grandparents and children divided by family stresses can rejoice after Senate Bill 727, which restores grandparents' visitation rights, became Public Act 542 on Monday.

"At last, we have constitutional protection for a fundamental family relationship, the one between kids and their grandparents," said Sen. Bruce Patterson, a member of the conference which labored for months on the language of the bill. "This should stand up in court now. It will help relieve stress and strain in many families where unhappy divisions have occurred."

On July 31, 2003, Michigan's Supreme Court, following a decision by the federal Supreme Court, ruled the state's previous grandparent visitation law unconstitutional.

"There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that grandparents play a vital role in a child's life and upbringing," Patterson said. "However, the high courts clearly indicated that grandparents' visitation rights are not fundamental, only derivative. And they did not give much guidance to what legislation will hold up in court. They simply said 'deference' must be given to 'fit' parents."

PA 542 restores the opportunity for grandparents in Michigan to seek visitation orders in certain strained family circumstances, so they may participate in the lives of their grandchildren. The term used now is "grandparenting time."

"Many grandparents have pleaded for restoration of their role in their grandchildren's lives – it is clearly the right thing to do, Patterson said. "I believe we have at last managed to establish constitutionally secure provisions. It has been a time-consuming process."

"I thank Representative Jim Howell and Senator Bruce Patterson for their conscientious work, diligent efforts and significant compassion shown in their never-ending fight and work towards protecting grandparents, grandchildren and families in our state," said Richard S. Victor, attorney and executive director of the national Grandparents' Rights group. Their tireless efforts have resulted in a new law as a wonderful gift to Michigan's families to start this new year.

"I believe this new law recognizes the needs and rights of children and grandparents to be able to have and continue a loving and meaningful relationship in their lives, while still respecting the rights of fit parents. Unfortunately, because of the human tragedy of death, divorce, children being born out of wedlock, or other family dysfunction, laws need to be in place to protect children who are being amputated from their family unnecessarily and inappropriately. This law does that."

"I am happy to say that Senator Patterson has supported 'grandparenting time' to the fullest extent, and the result is an elegant compromise that goes a long way toward restoring grandparents' rights, without too heavy a burden on them to prove that they have such rights," said Bill Knox, legislative representative for AARP. "I also commend Senator Alan Sanborn and Representative Jim Howell for their roles in bringing this complex issue to a great outcome."

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